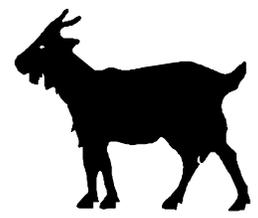


# Nannygoats



The Forum Theatre on Main Street in Metuchen opened in March 1928, at the end of the silent movie era and the beginning of the Golden Age of Hollywood cinema. The building was constructed for local businessmen James Forgione and H.A. Rumler, who named the building by combining the first three letters of each of their last names. While relatively modest on the exterior, the interior



covered with leather, an excellent Page organ, will be attractively decorated, and in every way possible designed for your comfort..." and "It is planned to own and operate this theatre entirely by local people. In this way only the best pictures may be presented and real community centre established, available for concerts, mass meetings, minstrel shows, or any civic or social gatherings."

The theatre was in constant use into the

## FORUM FACES FUTURE

was designed in the Art Moderne style with sleek, curved surfaces. When it opened, it was hailed as a modern and comfortable building for movies and all forms of entertainment.

According to an article in the *Metuchen Recorder* on February 10, 1928, a modern cinema building was long-awaited, and local businesses worked together to create a company to provide a "better home for our amusements" and build a structure that would be "centrally located, well ventilated and heated, will contain comfortable spring seats

by **Tyreen A. Reuter**



1980s, and is still remembered well by long-time residents for showing first run movies. In 1983, the building was sold to Oscar Loewy, a Metuchen resident and owner of a designer fur shop also located on Main Street.

An arts company was formed with Mr. Loewy's son, Peter, at the helm and under his guidance, and relying heavily on his experience in the entertainment industry, it thrived for many years.

*Continued on Page 4*

# The Grimstead Correspondence, Part 2: Grimstead a Gold Miner?

By Andrew Kupersmit

As mentioned in Part 1, the author purchased nine envelopes and letters of mid-nineteenth century Grimstead family correspondence. Among this correspondence are six letters from Benicia, California (near San Francisco) to Grimstead family members in Metuchen.

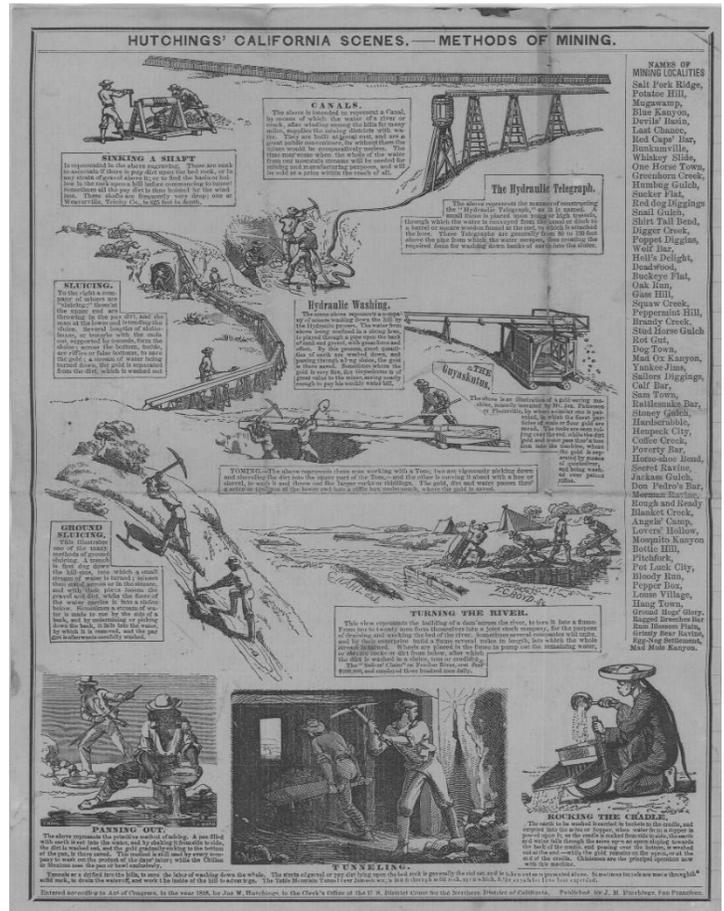
The best of the bunch is a one page letter written on a double sheet with the back page being a printed advertisement for *Hutchings' California Scenes. – Methods of Mining* (see image on the right). There are a few in the series, but this one illustrates methods of gold mining and lists mining localities. The letter, datelined “Benicia Oct. 18, 1854,” reads as follows:

My Dear Wife,

I Rec'd your and the children letters of Sept. 18 by the Last Steamers and was very much rejoiced to hear of Robert's safe return and I should like much to hear where he has been and what he has been doing and how he has fared. I wish that he would write to me himself and give me a history of his adventures.

I am very glad to hear that you got the money all right. I am in hopes I shall be able to send you some more before long. I would like to know if you have paid Blount what he lent you and if you have not had it to spare I must send it to him. Let me know in your next. I am very glad that Libby is such a good little girl as to try so hard to write to her father and I want her to write more. And I will send her own some of these times when I have time to write.

I am quite busy just now and have to write by candle light which is very bad for my eyes and I must make this short as it is bed time and I have also to write



to Mr. Butterworth. Rec'd Martha's and Hank's letters of Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup> but I did not write by the last mail. I will think what I would like to have Robert do and write next mail. I will now bid you good night.

From your affectionate husband, give my love to all,

James Grimstead.

This letter from Benicia to Metuchen likely traveled by steamer around South America as it was the fastest route between San Francisco and New York in the 1850s, much quicker than traveling overland at that time. Still, it would take several months for letters and people to travel this route until there were faster means, such as the transcontinental railroad which (completed in 1869) and the Panama Canal (completed in 1914).

## A Letter from the Incoming President of the Society...



Greetings everyone! Yeah, that's right folks, it really is true, I'm the new President of the Society!

I want to start by thanking our outgoing directors for their contribution to the Society's efforts, especially longtime board member Phyllis Boeddinghaus, who has retired from the Board – Phyllis we love you and we will miss you desperately! Thanks also to outgoing director Kathy Glaser – Kathy, we hope to work together with you and the rest of the Metuchen Arts Council to preserve and restore The Forum Theatre as the performing arts jewel of Metuchen's downtown that we all know it can be!

I would also like to introduce and welcome our new board members, Kathleen Carlucci, Director of the Thomas Edison Center at Menlo Park; Tom McKiernan, lifelong Metuchen and Edison resident; and Sharon Taylor, a perennially active Metuchen volunteer, who stepped up at the Society's Annual Meeting to fill the vacant post of Recording Secretary.

Our outgoing officers and our other directors are, thankfully, staying on the board, and in some cases have taken on new offices (see Page 7), so I can thank them in person at our next meeting.

My primary goals for the Society this year include working closely with Society Board Members Kathleen Carlucci and Russ Gehrum and the Board of the Edison Memorial Tower Corporation to develop joint local history events at the Thomas Edison Center at Menlo Park, advocating for the preservation of The Forum Theatre, establishing a preservation and improvement plan for the Metuchen Colonial Cemetery, assisting the Borough of Metuchen with applying for historic preservation grant funding, and establishing a relationship with the Edison Township Public Schools to serve as a resource for local history classroom materials.

On that last note, in 2015 the Society donated copies of the Metuchen Colonial Cemetery brochure to Metuchen High School. The brochure, produced in 2000 by the Metuchen Centennial Commission, contains information on the Revolutionary War soldiers and patriots buried in Metuchen. The Colonial Cemetery brochures were used in the classroom this fall as part of the new local history element in the AP US History classes taught by Mr. Christopher Giddes.

I would also like to thank our members who volunteer their time to help staff the Society's booth at events like the Metuchen Country Fair, or who stuff envelopes, or apply stamps, because we need all the help we can get! Finally, I would like to ask all our members for a favor this year: please ask your friends and family to become members of the Society.

*Historically Yours, Evelyn Grant*

p.s. Always remember, it's "A historic." ;)

## 1901 City Directory, Column 1

Now that all sixteen columns of the 1928 Directory of Metuchen have been reproduced in past issues of *Nannygoats*, relevant sections of 1901 Polk's New Brunswick City Directory for our area will be reproduced. Below is the first section, for the Bonhamtown area.

For the Largest Variety of  
**Dry and Fancy Goods** MARKS BROS.  
IN MIDDLESEX COUNTY  
... GO TO ... 11 to 15 Peace Street.

388 BONHAMTOWN DIRECTORY.

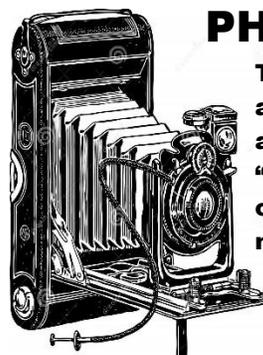
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**BONHAMTOWN.**

Bergh H. C. (Rev.)  
Clawson R. W. farmer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Compas Jacob, laborer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Condo John, farmer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Conover Thomas, motorman, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Cordo Alvin, laborer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Cordo Frank, baker, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Edgar William T. farmer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Guest Thomas, farmer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Lorenson Ned. ice dealer  
Manning William F. Mrs. farmer  
McGinnis, Richard, gardener  
Morris John S. blacksmith, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Mundy Benj. S. blacksmith, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Nelson Louis, teamster, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Rolfe David, teamster, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Rolfe George, laborer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Rolfe Mary, widow Samuel, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Rolfe William H. engineer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Rolfe William H. jr. fireman, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Serviss H. hotel  
Staffer Christian, wheelwright, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Tappen Albert, clerk, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Tappen Charles, truck farmer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Tappen Erastus, contractor, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Tappen Everett, coal and wood, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Tappen Joseph H. truck-farmer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Tappen Voorhees, truck farmer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Tappen William, truck farmer, Perth Amboy turnpike  
Weeks C. C. farmer

---

**L. GRONK & SON,** DEALERS IN  
FINE CABINET MANTELS,  
Beasts and Ceramic Tiles.  
Gas Logs, Gas Grates, and Everything for the Fire-Place.  
Branch Office: 137-139-141 BURNET STREET,  
PLAINFIELD, N. J. NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.



## PHOTOS WANTED!

The Society is always in acquiring photographs of our area – either originals or copies. "Old" photos are wonderful, but our recent past (and present!) needs to be well documented, too, for future generations. Contact us at [info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](mailto:info@metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org).

Continued from Page 1

Several things in recent years have combined to make operating the theatre more difficult. Due to the changing technology of movie projection, the system at the Forum would need a very costly update in order to be competitive with surrounding mass-market cinemas. In addition, the building is in need of major infrastructure upgrades and has been intermittently closed to make repairs. The current property owner has more details about these issues, but these are things known to the public through appeals for support and assistance.

However, regardless of these difficulties, The Forum has continued to operate, but has been increasingly less active as the issues with the projection and the building continue. It was placed on the market a few years ago, then taken off.

Very recently it was placed on the market again and, considering the vast development interest in Metuchen at this time, many residents fear that a developer will purchase and redevelop this property, which is only two blocks from the NJ TRANSIT Northeast Corridor train station. These developments include several large-scale multi-million dollar projects with hundreds of units of housing, a new grocery store, and several commercial developments.

While Metuchen has a Historic Preservation Committee, it does not have a *commission*, and there is no ordinance that would protect this property based on its historic value alone. However, it was identified in a 1990 Historic Sites Inventory as a "contributing" historic site and may be eligible for listing on the New Jersey and



National Registers of Historic Places for similar reasons as other early 20th century movie houses in New Jersey, such as Sussex Borough's Crescent Theatre. According to the National Register nomination for that resource;

...the theater helped define the thriving commercial district... Local businessmen owned Crescent Theatre for the first several decades of its operation before it was sold to a national chain, thus it also serves as a model for how independent theaters fared in the oftentimes contentious relationship between Hollywood production companies, distributors, and small movie houses. The life of Crescent Theatre reflects the life of the independent theater in America: established when film technology was just becoming a mass-audience attraction; reaching a pinnacle with the introduction of sound in movies; struggling through the economic devastation of the Great Depression, the competition brought about by television and the exodus of businesses from downtown business districts...

The footprint and exterior of the Forum has changed little since its founding and retains its highly recognizable marquee on its front facade. It has been – and has the potential to continue to be – the cultural highlight in the Borough and surrounding area.

Since its establishment as its own municipality in 1900, Metuchen has actively cultivated its intellectual and artistic community, and at times has been widely lauded as a cultural center – it still values its title as the "Brainy Borough." The last decade has seen a resurgence of interest in and support for the arts locally, both visual and performing.

Between the establishment of permanent art galleries, a month-long community arts fest, renewed interest in public art, and growing support for music and dance performances, it seems that a venue such as The Forum already has an audience and “stable” of local talent to be harnessed. Add to this the fact that Metuchen is an ideal midpoint between New York City and Philadelphia, and has a number of area hotels associated with Raritan Center.

Another, much smaller building in the borough had a close call in 1902. The Old Franklin Schoolhouse, now owned by the non-profit Borough Improvement League, was slightly less than 100 years old and considered by some obsolete. A “Metuchen Casino Company” had formed and was preparing to demolish it to make way for a gaming hall, with the possible reuse of the existing building as a stables. Without a group of pesky preservationists who saw its beauty and use, it would have

been lost. Today it is the closest thing the town has to a community and cultural center, its support is growing, and it is highly valued as a historic resource representative of our past. It could have easily been lost, however, in favor of short-sighted financial gain.

Metuchen is poised to change greatly over the next couple of years, and I believe The Forum is an invaluable asset that we cannot afford to lose. I like to look at it as an inheritance for our great-grandchildren, a local treasure, one that they will not only enjoy and benefit from, but will tell them about our past and our community were well valued in our time.



Images, starting on Page 1 and continuing Page 4 and 5, from top to bottom, are all on file in the Society archives, except where noted. 1 & 2. Exterior and interior of the Forum, respectively, ca. 1928. 3. February 10, 1928 article on the front page of the *Metuchen Recorder*. 4. H.A. Rumler, as he appears in the 1929 movie of Metuchen. 5. Advertisement in the *Metuchen Recorder* for showings at the Forum. 6. The Forum marquee advertising twice daily showings of *Gone With The Wind*, ca. 1940. 7. Senator John Kennedy riding in an open car past the Forum, 1960 (courtesy of Benjamin Bisogne). 8. Patrons flock to the Forum, ca. 2012 (photograph by *Metuchen Living*). 9. The Forum, for sale, in December, 2015.



## METUCHEN AND HER HISTORY, 1870 (III)

The following is the third installment of Dr. E.M. Hunt's "Metuchen and Her History," written in 1870, which we began reprinting serially in issues of *Nannygoats*, beginning in the Winter/Spring 2015 edition. Many thanks to Society Vice President Dominic T. Walker for transcribing this document.

The Craiges, Edgars, Jacksons, and probably the Hamptons and Potters, were of this same Scottish faith, and like the Scotch-Irish families before named, preferred banishment to that unlawful authority which attempted to govern them in matters of conscience.

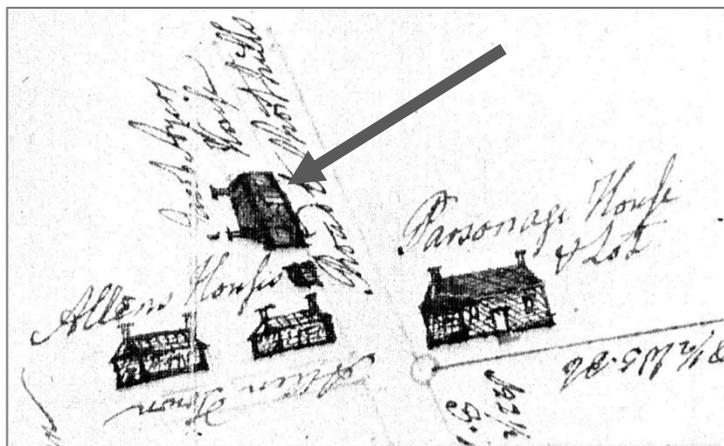
The Ackens, Conwells, "Manings" of the Maning Thornal family, were among those who came to Amboy in the famous "Caledonia" during the Scottish troubles of 1715. All these were Presbyterian Covenanters.

With such settlements from New England, Scotland and Ireland, it can be said of us as truly as it has been said with other reference, that we too had the "wheat of three kingdoms," and thus furnished, had vouchsafed to us foundation material most hopeful and substantial.

The settlers about Woodbridge village maintained religious worship, although the church was not instituted until 1792. Town and church matters were so united, after New England custom, that our people here were in both alike identified with them, except such as were included in Piscataway. The Baptist church in Piscataway was established in 1680, and this too was part and parcel of "town affairs," and was voted about and provided for at "town meetings," like other material interests.

The first Seventh Day Baptist congregation in New Jersey had its meeting house above New Durham at the head of the Amboy and Boundbrook Turnpike, which passes through this village. Its formation is said to have resulted from a discussion between one Mr. Bonham and a minister named Durham as to the proper day to be observed. After the meeting-house

was removed toward Newmarket, some of the Bonham family settled among those of their faith in Shiloh, West Jersey, where the name still obtains; and I have somewhere been told that Bonham, Texas, owes its name to a branch of this family. I have noted this fact because the name Bonhamtown makes these



Top: A 2001 photograph of the Jacob Ayers House at 535 Main Street (on file at the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society.) Above: Excerpt of the 1799 *Division of the Lands of Daniel Hampton* (on file at the Middlesex County Courthouse), with the house indicated.

necessary incidents of interest to us, as being derived from this family. The wife of Jacob Ayres, whose descendants are still among us, had Bonham as her maiden name.

The name "Metuching" was applied to the section of country bounded by the Short Hills on the north, by Piscataway on the west, by the Raritan on the south, and by Rahway on the East, without any very precise limits of territory. Local names, such as those of Pumptown, Allentown, Bonhamtown, were sometimes used, but this was the general appellative, and the church was always known as the Metuching Meeting-house. There is reason to believe that the name

was more distinctly applied to the region between where Mr. Greason's house now is and the Oak Tree neighborhood. I have in my possession a deed executed in 1811, in which a certain piece of land beyond Pumptown is described as on the road leading from Metuchen to Bonhamtown. As more business was done in that direction than here, it is not surprising that the name was prominently applied to that vicinity. All these smaller towns are now included in the village of Metuchen. **To be continued in the next issue.**



Dear Editor:

I noticed in the Summer 2015 issue of *Nannygoats* a picture of Helen Williams Dana volunteering at the Airplane Spotting Post in Metuchen, donated by Audrey Dana. My father, Martin Jessen, wrote a story in his book, *Marty's Musings: Tales of the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, and New Jersey*, titled "Airplane Spotting."

In the story he describes the spotting post just as it appears in this photograph—office, telephone, and windows!

We are currently working on his next book, *Marty's Navy Musings: World War II* and are going to include the "Airplane Spotting" story in the book. Would it be possible to include this picture in the book? What is the procedure for doing this?

The photograph is a wonderful piece of Americana. It shows a well-to-do woman in her mid-forties volunteering for the war effort. Notice the beautiful 1940's hairstyle and pretty well-maintained blouse. My father knew Helen Williams Dana's son, Walter Dana. They both graduated from the Metuchen High School Class of 1944.

When I was a young girl my father took me to what I believe was an estate sale at the Dana mansion in Raritan Township. The house was pretty bare, but when I walked inside, I was overwhelmed by a very long and wide center staircase that dominated the entrance hall. I envisioned women with fancy hairstyles in elegant evening gowns descending the staircase for a lavish party. I had never been in such a grand home that was not a museum before. I remember being impressed by the large butler's pantry which had lots of cabinets—floor to ceiling. My father told me that unfortunately the house, which sat on a large piece of property, was going to be torn down for a housing development. I could not understand how such a beautiful home, full of memories, could be torn down. This made quite an impression on me.

In discussing the Helen Williams Dana photograph with my father, he pointed out that the observation building was only two-stories high and was not a tower. It was always called the "Airplane Spotting Post." I hope this information is helpful.

Sincerely, Nancy E. Jessen

*Editor: Yes, indeed, Nancy! We love your informative letters and are looking forward anxiously to your father's forthcoming book!*

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**Note: The Society published two issues in 2015; Volume 13, Issue 1 and Volume 13, Issue 2. Generally the Society publishes three issues per year, but in 2015 devoted its efforts towards the publication of the "Greetings from Metuchen and Edison" full-color postcard book as well as an issue of *Nannykids*, our newsletter for children.**

The name of the newsletter, "Nannygoats," is taken from the title of a collection of anecdotes, articles, reminiscences, and letters compiled by photographer J. Lloyd Grimstead. He took more than 2,800 photographs of the Metuchen-Edison area, mostly during the 1930s, which make up 80 percent of the Historical Society's photographic collection. The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society dedicates this publication to Lloyd Grimstead, as a way of honoring him for preserving so much of our local history.  
*The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.*

## Society Merchandise

Thanks to CafePress.com, the society sells a number of products with local history graphics on them, all online! Browse and buy from the comfort of your home or office any time... and, as with sales at the Country Fair and Local History Day, all net proceeds go to support the society's mission. .

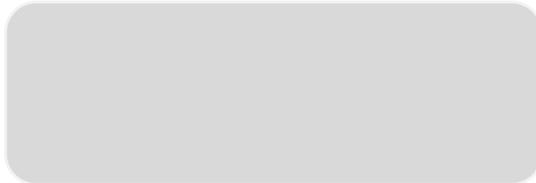
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**A century-long anecdotal adventure in  
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Released in October 2015, this original historical society publication includes more than 300 full color images on 150 pages. The images are entertainingly annotated and provide a lively, guided tour through local history by means of postcard views and souvenirs from both the Society's and private collections. Makes an ideal gift for local history fans and deltiologists alike! Download an order form from

**[www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org](http://www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org)**



## **DID YOU KNOW?**

Puppeteer Kermit Love (1916-2008), who created Big Bird and Snuffleupagus, lived in Metuchen as a child. He attended the Franklin School on Middlesex Avenue (see his class photograph above). He lived with this grandmother at 252 Main Street; it still stands at the foot of Spring Street, next to the barber shop. Despite the coincidental name and his lengthy professional involvement with Jim Henson, he always denied that "Kermit the Frog" was named for him.



## **Did Lucille Ball live in Edison or Metuchen?**

Inquiring minds want to know!  
Stay tuned for the next 'episode'  
of *Nannygoats* to discover the  
truth behind the legend!